

National visitation on the Western Front: A study of some Great War cemeteries

Dr Caroline Winter
University of Ballarat
Trier 2012

Cemeteries & memorials built by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

1914-1918 war dead in CWGC care (ID burials and memorials)

	Total	%
United Kingdom	887,748	79.6
India	74,189	6.6
Canada	64,988	5.8
Australia	61,986	5.6
New Zealand	18,051	1.6
South Africa	9,477	.8
Total	1,116,439	100%

Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2011) *Annual Report 2010-2011* ²

Method

- Sample of 66 cemeteries – convenience
- Collection of data from visitor books
- Projection of entries for one year
- Min days used for projection = 114 days
- Large and small sites accessed
- Cluster analysis used to group cemeteries into similar visitation magnitudes

Method



Method cont.

- Small cemeteries may not have a book
- Estimates indicate that as few as 5% of visitors sign the book. This is based upon estimates of actual visitation at Tyne Cot (228,027) and Lijssenthoek (29,509) by Vandaele & Monballyu (2008)

5

La Belle Alliance -no book-



Nationality of VBE authors

6

- 56.4% = UK
- 14.2% = Australia
- 6.9% = Canada
- 3.7% = Belgium
- 2.7% = N/Lands
- 2.0% = NZ
- 1.5% = France
- 0.9% = USA
- 2.1% = Other (x58)
- 9.6% = Not indicated



Each site is unique

- It is well known that cemeteries can be read as text to indicate their role during the war (Mosse, 1990; Laqueur, 1994)
- Current day settings **may** influence visitation independently of historic context
- Eg location near larger sites, location, aesthetics, identified burials, large size

8



Very high visitation sites – Clusters 7, 6, 5, (Table 1)

- Cl. 7 (n=1) Tyne Cot - “everyone” visits
- Cl.6 (n=2) Lijssenthoek, Essex Farm
- Cl. 5 (n=4) Ramparts, VC Corner, Ploegsteert Mem. Sanctuary Wood
- Special “features” that tend to attract visitors from many nations: large size, location, John McCrae, trenches, national memorials



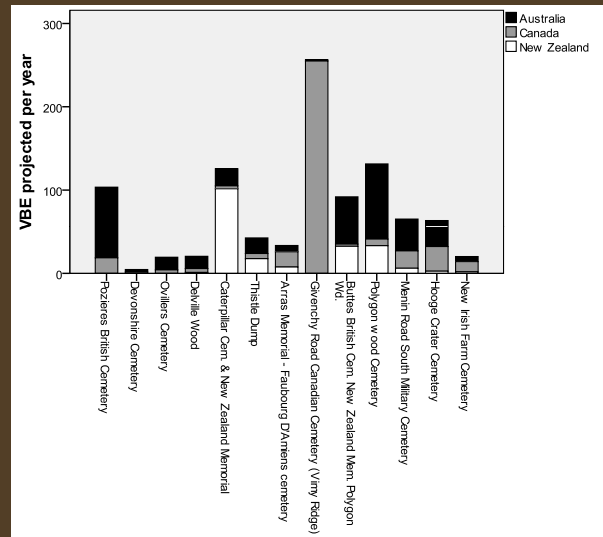


Fig 1 – Cluster 4 (n=13)
Australia, Canada, New Zealand

- This is the next level of visitation and where national preferences begin to be more clearly shown
 - tends to reflect major battle sites
- Canada at Vimy Ridge
- Australia at Polygon Wood, Pozieres
- New Zealand at Caterpillar valley

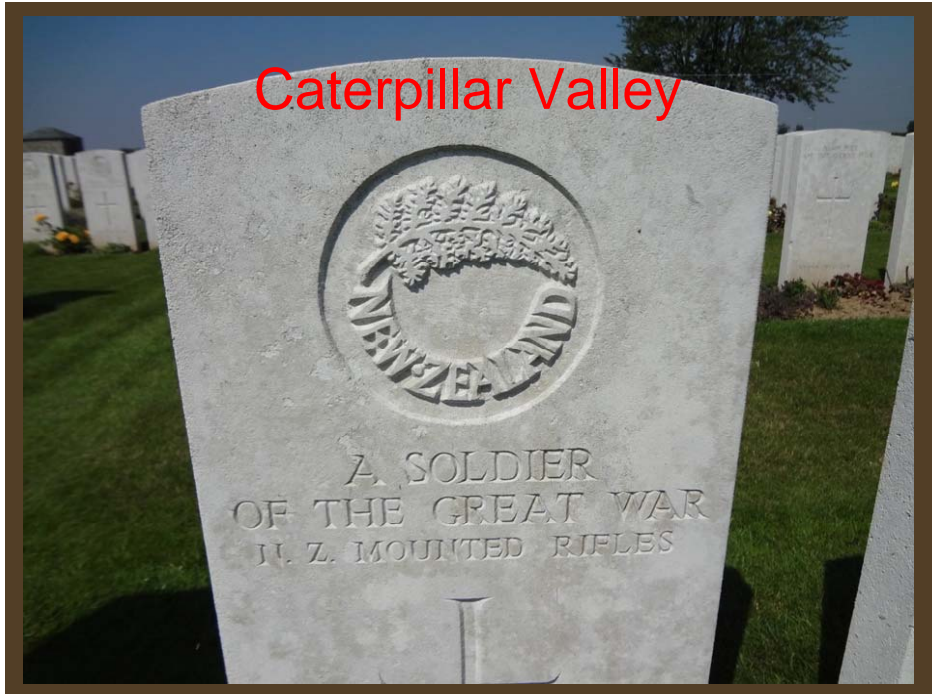
Figure 1. Cluster 4:

Projected VBE for Australia, Canada, New Zealand



17

Caterpillar Valley



Hooge Crater

Cluster 3 – similar national preferences shown

- Canada at Adanac
- Australians at Toronto
- NZ at Prowse Point

20



Adanac (cl 3)

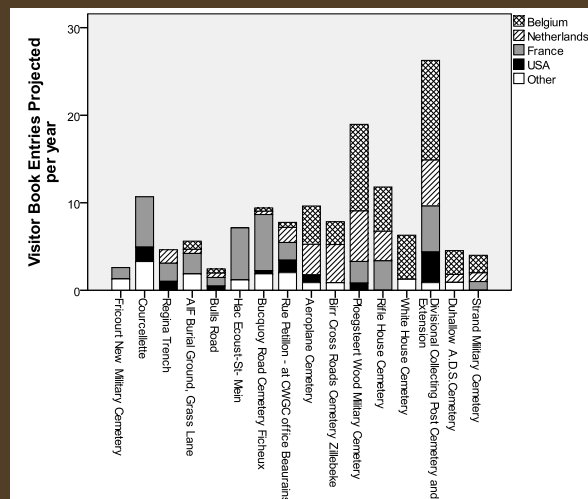
21

Non British Commonwealth VBE Fig 2, Cluster 2

- Highest in cemeteries close to one's own country – reflects French, Belgian and Netherlands visitation
- Lower French VBE due to much higher proportion of Belgian sites in this study
- No clear pattern for other nations – may be an effect of tour guides or presence of large tour groups. More detailed study needed.

22

Figure 2. Cluster 2: Projected VBE for non British Commonwealth countries



23



Courcellette (cl. 2)

Cluster 1 - Smallest VBE

- Martinpuich British Cemetery (115)
- Blauwe-poort Farm Cem. (90)
- Bazentin Le Petit Comm. Cem. Ext (185)
- Div. Cem Dickebusch Rd Vlamertinge (283)
- La Brique #1 (91)
- Morchies Military Cem (163)
- Not necessarily small cemeteries

25

Bazentin le Petit (cl. 1)



Cluster 1 (Table 2) – very small visitation

- Tend to be small sites, but not always the case – often these sites are located off the beaten track. There are exceptions however.
- ALL are visited
- ‘Other’ nations visit most of these sites

27

Conclusions

- The CWGC cemeteries provide a highly visible marker of the Great War, often in the absence of other evidence
- Visitation is the enactment of memory – remembrance

28

Conclusions

- The link between national preferences and the landscape are evident for a range of reasons:
- The physical location of the dead – according to Tuan, creates sacred sites
- Large battles and cemeteries may also be marked by national monuments
- Convenience – to home
- Visitation also reflects an industrialised European war and the need to respect all of those involved

29

Lest we forget

AIF Burial Ground, Grass Lane



30